ADITI VAIDYA:
I want to welcome you to today's session Profiles In Community Power: Building a People-Centered Movement. This is the second session of a four-part webinar series focused on insights from the Lead Local collaborative. If you haven't already, I invite you to sign up for subsequent webinars. The link will be appearing in your chat in a little while.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provides support for the collaborative and this web series. We want to thank the University of Southern California Equity Research Institute for hosting this series. The Equity Research Institute was one of the grantees in the Lead Local collaborative.

The chat will be closed for most of the session, but we will keep it open for the first few minutes. I would invite you to add your name, the organization you're with, and the location you're joining us from so we get a sense of who is in the virtual space here.

We will focus and take a deep dive on Minneapolis, one of the highly populated cities in the Minnesota, which has led the way on a set of community-led initiatives including paid sick leave, minimum wage, raising it to $15 an hour, and building systems to include residents in decision-making and policy implementation. At the state level, Minnesota has expanded Medicaid and has created the Center for Health Equity, which has dramatically lowered the number of uninsured and addressed racial disparities in health outcomes. These victories, and many more, are result of decades of organizing, building an interconnected ecosystem of organizations, and experimenting with new strategies, all toward the goal of building community
power. Among the many unique capacities in Minneapolis is the sharing of resources and skills across a rich ecosystem focused on co-governance and driving change in legislative and administrative arenas.

What do we mean by community power? Community power, as we define it and through the research of the Lead Local collaborative, is the ability for communities most impacted by structural inequities to develop, sustain, and grow an organized base of people, who act together through democratic structures, to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence decision-makers, and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability to change systems and to advance health equity.

And what their building power for us to achieve structural change. Structural change, is about fundamentally addressing the root causes of inequities. So that includes systems, laws, institutional polices and practices, cultural norms that all shape the different conditions that make up how communities work. Central to the Lead Local collaborative work is how community power is built, and how power impacts change at the local and state levels.

The Lead Local collaborative partnered with 40 local community power building groups across the country, including the organizations of our panelists today, who we will introduce in a minute. Today’s session will shed light on how state and local organizations in Minnesota are focusing and moving forward work in these challenging times -- sharing resources and skills among one another, and focusing on addressing and immediate needs toward longer structural change. We will have time for a Q&A at the end and we hope that you will take the opportunity to submit your questions via the Q&A function at the bottom of your screens.

So let us start with introducing our amazing panelists. Doran Schrantz is the Executive Director of ISAIAH, which is the faith-based organizing institution in Minnesota, which is a vehicle for people to take action collectively for racial and economic justice in the state. They develop deep grassroots community-based leadership in communities across the state to affect systems change and policy change at the local, state, and regional level.

Our other panelist is Elianne Farhat, Executive Director of TakeAction Minnesota, an alliance of organizations and individuals committed to social, economic, and racial justice. They were founded 14 years ago through the merger of two predecessor organizations, and are currently a hub and a point of connection within the state’s social justice infrastructure ecosystem. TakeAction has 20 organizational members and 50,000 supporters, and among the many things they do is train activists to become community activists and engage in meaningful change. Both ISAIAH and TakeAction Minnesota are central to the community power building ecosystem of Minnesota. Together with others, they run a wide range of campaigns, including defeating voter restriction amendment, supporting strong foreclosure mediation policies, expanding access to healthcare and affordable childcare, raising the minimum wage, working to pass paid family and medical leave, and more statewide.

Thank you for joining us, Doran and Elianne. We want to discuss how your organizations and the ecosystem help in building community power over time. And then we will take a look how we what you’ve learned from building that ecosystem, how you have responded to crisis and how you are working together now proactively for structural change. Let us take a step back, we have just under 40 minutes, so we will do a kind of back to the future race to understand what Minnesota’s history has looked like around community power building. Doran, we would love for
you to kick us off, and then Elianne to add, to paint a picture of what community power group looks like in the state and how you aligned, and a bit of the timeline that shows the arc of the work, and the infrastructure.

DORAN SCHRANTZ:
Thank you so much for having me here and this conversation today, and for everyone who is attending. My name is Doran Schrantz, and I am with ISAIAH. What I will do is lay a foundation about what we think about community power building and what it has to do with advancing structural change. Then from that foundation, what is our orientation around building an ecosystem of movements, community power building organizations. No one organization creates structural change in a city, in a region, or in a state. And then give you an example, a timeline, back to the future as Aditi said, and tee it up for Elianne to talk about what’s happened over the past two years. Minneapolis has been the center of a lot of national and local conversation and a lot of challenges.

I want to connect the dot between community-rooted power building organizations and having a strategic capacity for long-term structural change. What is the connection between those two? So, our organizations and a lot of the organizations we will talk about today, are first and foremost building constituencies. Constituencies, we would say that is a base, but what it really is, is a vehicle for the human element for people to have a public life, to have a public voice. The goal is to construct recognized constituencies over time. And that those constituencies, this is an important point, have the capacity to sustain the demonstrable presence over time. That means TakeAction and ISAIAH are not working on one issue, it is not one mobilization, it is over the course of years, months, and decades, showing in the public arena where power and policy are happening, that this constituency is recognized. It has to be dealt with, negotiated with, and these might be new constituencies at the policymaking table.

For example, the emergence of the Muslim coalition and ISAIAH. The Muslim coalition has become a vehicle for Somali Minnesotans, who now are a recognized base of power both in political arenas and policymaking arenas. It makes something new possible because they have a set of interests they are trying to advance. Or tenants .... Renters have not been a recognized constituency at the table to change housing policy. The emergence of a tenants rights organization has changed politics in Minneapolis and in the state. The emergence of young people, I could go on and on ... that is a central for structural thing on racial economic equity. However, as I said, no one constituency does alone, so we have been very intentional in the past 10 to 12 years, what does it mean to build an ecosystem of constituencies, of organizations, and of movements, that over time, can have an impact that leans toward structural change or changes in government?

The goal of ecosystem, is can these different constituencies share strategic capacity? That might look like staff, or resources. It might look like shared relationships with organizations and advocates that have different capacities than we have, such as policy or advocacy or expertise or academic relationships. Can we build a space that has a shared analysis? Not just a shared issue, like we are working on this campaign, but a shared analysis of power with a the long-term power analysis. Where do we want to be in five years? What do we want, something we think really matters to our constituency isn't on the menu right now? It is an even being discussed by policymakers. How are we going to get it on the agenda? What is the pathway to get it on the
agenda? What type of political power do we need to build? How can we think together for the strategic policy that has to happen through that?

A lot of our organizations have been building the political capacity intentionally over the last few years. And organizations like TakeAction or ISAIAH have supported organizations in building that kind of political power with a long-term horizon. So this is not a coalition that works on one issue, although that is something that we do. That is like a form that exists to achieve a tactical short-term purpose. It is not all one big organization. It is different hubs and constellations of relationships and power. And that is OK.

It is not one strategy, it is not uniform, it is about building the kind of relational network and intentional constellation of relationships that can hold a strategic orientation over time.

In the last 10 or 12 years, it has been confusing to some funders, or even to ourselves, that we had names for things that were different over the years. Because I am a strong believer that form follows function. To give an example of what this strategic policy building over the last 10 years looks like, I will go backward and then Elianne will talk about now and in the future. In my experience, about 10 years ago, we as a set of organizational leaders, partners, organizers, really confronted the fact that we cannot do it alone. We needed something beyond tactical campaigning or coalition building. We needed root infrastructure and a long-term plan for power that allowed new power to emerge. New constituencies which maybe don’t fit in any of the organizations that currently exist. So we started doing very intentional partnerships. Like ISAIAH and the Services International Union, did political education. It sounds like a really simple thing to do, but at the time, it felt very revolutionary.

TakeAction and ISAIAH had that kind of similar process with one another. We did bilateral political education and planning, and started to sort of knit the fabric together of a set of critical organizations that represented critical constituencies. And that evolved into something called Minnesotans for a Fair Economy. What was most part about it is we experimented with sharing capacities like research, campaign infrastructure; we built spaces where we could get together and ask ourselves what five years could look like? What kind of education do we need? How do we teach each other how to do new things? It was that configuration that built the strategic capacity. It wasn’t only those organizations, but it helped support the strategic capacity for things like passing $15 minimum wage, paid sick days, fighting voter restriction amendment.

Based on that, we moved to a wider network of experimenting with statewide governance alignment called Our Minnesota Future. That was a bigger network that was sort of taking some of the principles we learned from the past. We operated in the context of the governor’s election in 2018.

And OMF really helped move a lot of major big picture issues onto the political agenda in Minnesota. Like paid sick days, affordable healthcare, 100% percent clean energy, significant benefits for undocumented people. Those became political issues that candidates and policymakers were putting at the center of their agenda instead of on the periphery.

In the last couple of years, especially in response to incredibly shifting and changing dynamics, we are shifting things around again to be able to strategically respond to what it is been like to move power and politics in Minnesota through the crisis of 2020 and 2021.
With that I will hand it over to Elianne.

ELIANNE FARHAT:
What I want to add for my vantage point, TakeAction is 13 years old, but I am new as the Executive Director in the last couple years. So, part of my perspective is not entering this ecosystem that Doran described at this point in our evolution. And I think a lot about two really important things in the next phases of the ecosystem and what we are building together.

One of the things I think about is talking about the importance of building organizations that can hold constituencies and be vehicles to advance them in public life. And the importance of those organizations being durably connected over time.

That's not just important for actually moving powerful change in the world. It's also an important orientation to understand that we are up against incredibly well-organized, durable, well-resourced infrastructure. And if we want to have any hope of the people power that we have meaningfully contesting against that infrastructure, we have to build infrastructure that can hold that people power and contest.

And so, it is a long-term project and we are not done yet. I think one of the current tests that we are in right now in Minnesota, I think we are passing, and I think it is something for all places building this type of infrastructure, testing the durability of the alignments, is that as staff change and organizations go through leadership transitions like the one TakeAction went through over the last couple years, and that many organizations in our ecosystem are going through, does the relational fabric maintain? Are they connected around something more durable, or meaningful, than individual relationships? And you have actually built that relational fabric and commitment to each other organizationally, institutionally, which is the type of connection we need to be building to create a durable network, aligned infrastructure. Not just for today, but to one day meaningfully take on the well-organized infrastructure we are up against.

That is one of the shifts we are going through in Minnesota. It's going to be hard no matter what, made harder over the last years and what we faced here, but also allowed for a lot of new things to emerge and grow out of that network of relationships. It is an exciting moment of transitioning growth, for us to be figuring out what is next here in Minnesota. Not just in relation to Minneapolis and the epicenter that our city is, but also for what we are building statewide as an organization. Our new shape and form and new names will be.

ADITI VAIDYA:
Thank you to you both. I felt that was 12 years in history in less than 10 minutes, and all verbally. It sounds like because there were so many organizations that both of your groups and others came together around, whether it was different formations like Minnesota for a Fair Economy or Our Minnesota Future that you named, or the way that leadership transition has resulted in the need to shift things, the thing I'm curious about is... how do you all work together in concrete ways?

It is clear you are not all one coalition, and there are a lot of different organizations that come together for specific things, that are in solidarity around other things. And that is just community organizing groups. That is really just the community power building infrastructure. But we know you sit in a much broader, nonprofit sector in the state. I'm wondering if we could do a couple things. One, so many of us were tracking and were trying to be supportive outside of the state
when George Floyd was killed in 2020. The question I have is a lot of what you have said of police brutality, and I know you will go into that Elianne in terms of current campaigns related to that issue, but I wonder if you could share a little about how the last 12 years, and the organizations that existed at the time when he was murdered, what that resulted in in the way you are all able to respond?

Was it the same groups that were always running campaigns in building this relational fabric that you talked about that responded the moment when George Floyd was killed? Were there new groups that emerged? Were there unorganized formations that became more formal? If you could take a few minutes to paint the picture of what it looked like, I would love to bring people into the 2020 moment and then go deeper into what that means now in 2021. Elianne let's start with you. I would love to hear your input.

ELIANNE FARHAT:
Big question. I will try to be quick. I will be quick because of time. When I go back to the moment of George Floyd's murder and then the subsequent uprising for racial justice in defense of Black Lives and in support of Black Dreams and then everything that came after that, I get a very urgent feeling in my body.

I start there because as human beings in the world, when we see harm and pain and crisis in front of us, our reaction is usually fight or flight. Either we jump in or run away. It's important as an organization to take a beat in that moment, and not jump in or run away, but get pretty crystal clear as an organization. What is your role in that moment? What is your highest and best use in that moment? What is your lane? Find it, name it, be clear about it, fill it to the best of your abilities, and also tell other people what you're doing so they know if it's covered or not covered.

That was really important for us as TakeAction as an organization, and all the other organizations that we are in relationship with. In that moment. And the reason that that is really important to also get clear about, in the context of building long-term infrastructure, is that our role as organizations building long-term people power changes in those moments.

So often times, our role is to organize people. And fill the streets, and have them contacting people, shape the public narrative. In crisis moments of mass uprising, and these major swells, that is not our job.

The streets are going to fill themselves. All the work we have done to set the conditions and the container, ourselves as well as many allies and partners across the ecosystem and across the nation and state, that is moving. And so our job in that moment is to then say, with an eye toward building long-term sustained infrastructure, and eye toward building organizations, what should we be doing right now? And what has everything we have built to this moment allow us to do and no one else can do this moment?

That led to a couple things, one is information sharing. In times of uprising in intensity, people need to just be connected. We need to be sharing information about what we're doing, what is moving in the landscape, and to use our relationships and connections to the governing infrastructure to get information about what the state response is or is not going to be, to get that into our communities. To get that into the hands of our people so that we can make informed decisions about how to care for one another.
The second thing that I saw happening, that organizations can do, is make meaning of the moment. It is a moment of incredible chaos, incredible uncertainty. Also incredible hope and possibility. In these moments of uprising in Minneapolis, it is a moment for us to use the communications and networks of individuals, the communication infrastructure and networks of individuals that we have collectively been building over time, and help make meaning of what is happening in the world.

That is incredibly important when you think about the power of narrative in setting up change for the future. It is really important to lean into hope and possibility of the moment, to honor the pain and death that brought us here. And to show people a path forward that we can build and grow new things out of this pain and destruction.

And then the third thing I think people need is hands. Part of what we have as organizations in that moment, our staff and skilled people who can jump into mutual aid infrastructure. Jump into organizing Black churches and mosques to make sure they have a safety plan in place. To jump in and support marshaling at protests. Jump in and help make connections to different policymakers and decision-making spaces as things are rapidly moving. To use that infrastructure we have built to support the moment, and support the movement that is happening.

The last thing I want to say, which happened in terms of infrastructure building in Minneapolis as a result of the uprising, which I think is somewhat unique to our context although it is not totally unique, it happens often -- in these moments of big crisis, particularly as a result of Black death and the response to it, money, resources flood into a state. That is something that we all need to contend with and say what that means about when we are resourcing Black leadership and Black organizing, and how we do that in a more intentional, sustained way. But it happens often, and usually what that means is that small emerging organizations, that are largely Black-led, usually young Black folks, running organizations, try to build something powerful in the world, get overwhelmed. With resources and national attention and scrutiny. It's a massive wave that oftentimes overwhelms small emerging organizations.

The other important thing that was possible because we as a movement ecosystem have made a commitment to intentionally invest in building organizations across the demographic landscape, but with real intention in Minnesota in building Black-led organizations, organizing Black people... was that we had actually infrastructure in place to support emerging organizations that were caught up in that wave.

So, it meant not only did they have partner capacities within TakeAction and other organizations to provide the financial operation infrastructure to manage the massive influx of resources that are coming in, but that then allowed them to focus on the organizing, the people engagement, not get totally bogged down in the additional infrastructure demands that got put on them pretty rapidly.

ADITI VAIDYA:
Thank you for laying that out. There is a lot to build off what you shared. How the ecosystem and infrastructure that you both are part of responded. It was really helpful to get that context, especially given that there were so many new organizations. A lot of resources that went in around particular aspects of this. So I appreciate you laying it out, and I think the purpose of our conversation and touching on that is to be able to say the infrastructure and ecosystem that you
are all a part of, that you had to build, that's about building community power, was able to respond to a crisis moment like that. To stay grounded in how you work, which is about organizing people and being able to understand when to step back, when to be supportive and how. The question I would like to get into is what that now looks like. Leading us to present day.

There are two campaigns that I'm excited for both of you to share with us on this webinar. And given the time, would love for maybe us to focus on how you identified those campaigns, how your organization is part of the ecosystem to advance those campaigns, and how those campaigns are part of structural change. We talked at the beginning about what structural change looks like, so why these two issues? I think we will focus on rent stabilization and public safety.

But I want those of us who are new to this, who are learning about power, to really understand there are so many issues that folks care about that impact our lives. So let us go into rent stabilization first. Doran, I would love for you to share a little about that work and that campaign and the question of how it fits into longer structural change. And if you could each take two minutes, three minutes each, that would be great. We are already getting great questions from the Q&A so I would love to bring them in, too.

DORAN SCHRANTZ:
One of the responsibilities amongst the many Elianne laid out, but the other responsibility of our shared infrastructure is, how do you walk through the door that a moment of uprising provides or opens.

So that is about channeling efforts toward governance and policymaking and structural change that would address some of the fundamental conditions that created the crisis in the first place. There are two campaigns unfolding that are linked together in very significant ways. Both in terms of who is at the table --I will talk about rent stabilization and Elianne will talk about public safety --but all of our organizations are working on all of it. If you open the door and saw the back room, or the engine room, there are a lot of the same engines driving the campaign.

Rent stabilization is, we are basically trying to make a charter amendment change that would allow the city council and a mayor to do a policymaking process that would produce rent stabilization.

The ballot initiative, it is mostly walking through an open door to open a door so renters can get access to some of the relief they need. The city is 51% renters. Part of the purpose of our infrastructure is to create space for the emergence of new organizations. And the tenants rights organization that has emerged in Minneapolis and has done incredible work, they have been laying a lot of groundwork for conversation about rent stabilization. Really got it on the agenda in the city. Now are partnering with the wider ecosystem to pass a charter change that would allow us to do a policymaking process. So the thing that is really significant about this, the reason rent stabilization is on the agenda, is because, previously, renters existed but they weren't a constituency that had power. Now they are.

The key to the rent stabilization is not only a policy, but the process of organizing a constituency, building a wider coalition, alignment, that could move a political process that could change a charter, and positioning renters 'at the table.' So that when there is a governance process to say "what are we going to do about rent and affordable housing?" one of the loudest,
most important constituencies in that mix, that is recognized and potentially feared by those who
make policy, that constituency will be part of shaping it.

I think the crisis was about police brutality, but the real crisis in the city is racial and economic
inequity. There is a growing and even majority constituency of young people, people of color,
working-class families that need powerful representation in the city. Or the crisis we got in 2020,
will repeat itself over and over again. Our responsibility is to channel that in structural change
that can create democratic policymaking, that meets the interest of the constituency that has
been neglected and in many cases abused by the current system.

ADITI VAIDYA:
That is great. I think it is helpful as we shift into the public safety amendment campaign to
understand the takeaways I'm getting from you Doran, which is that we all have different
identities. Being a renter is one identity, among others. And Elianne, as you said in the
beginning, you are all among a set of organizations creating the container and the space for
those folks who have different identities to be able to engage and organize and build their
leadership skills. That for renters there is now recognized constituency.

I'm curious in the public safety amendment, if you could take two minutes, Elianne, to lay out,
especially everything you shared around the response to the killing of George Floyd, why this
amendment matters, who the constituency is, and how it fits into the long-term structural change
agenda.

ELIANNE FARHAT:
Mass uprising does not create change. It cannot do it without work before it and after it. It is a
force to create more change, create more space for us to get into and build in, but in and of
itself it does not create change. So when I think of the uprising and the impact on changes to
truly achieve public safety, there is part of the story that we are already winning. That is
because organizations like MPD 150, Black Visions, Reclaim the Block were on the ground
organizing and raising the question around a broken policing system that fails at its one job,
which is keeping us safe, and that has 150+ year history of brutalizing Black and Native and
brown people in the city of Minneapolis, and pushing the city of Minneapolis to make change.,
We wouldn't have seen the immediate responses we saw, like the University of Minnesota
canceling their contract with MPD, Minneapolis Public Schools canceling the contract as well,
countless businesses also canceling, and the Safety for All budget that moved $8 million out of
policing into proven strategies that actually advance public safety in our communities.

We already started winning. And what we then came up against, and it was only possible
because multiracial crew of young people and Black leaders, years before that moment,
organizing and pushing us to do better and to build something better, that we can have true
public safety in our city.

We reach limits because our infrastructure, our governing infrastructure, was built by people
who don't have the same interest and values as us. Grounded in white supremacy and
capitalism, patriarchy, grounded in a system that was designed to keep control with a few
people, using violent force.

So what we have run up against now, is our charter, our city constitution. Similar to rent
stabilization, we have to remove barriers to actually build the world we want to live in. There's
only so much we can do because our system is designed at its core to continue to produce bad, unsafe, violent outcomes.

Right now, what we have to do to continue to make the change and build true safety is to change our charter. Use our democratic right and moral obligation to change our charter, that was basically written, an element that was written in 1961 by the Police Federation, the police union, to lock in a system of policing that is failing us and is not keeping us safe. So right now, there is a Black-led coalition of about 37 organizations, from labor unions to faith groups to grassroots organizations, emerging organizations, who have never done this type of work before, coming together to take control of our future. And we are going to rewrite our city charter so that we can build a department of public safety that uses a public health approach and begins to invest in all the strategies that we know work to actually keep us safe.

So on the ballot this November is Yes for Minneapolis, question number two, creating a department of public safety that opens the door to build the system we need to keep a safe.

ADITI VAIDYA:
I'm looking at the Q&A, and we have gotten a lot of great questions. So just in the interest of time and the fact that there are so any different aspects of this you have laid out. I wonder if we can raise a theme that is coming up in the Q&A. And if you can close with your thoughts on that theme.

One of the things that we know from our Lead Local work together is that there are lots of different capacities that are needed for change. And you've talked about many of these. And that base building, building a constituency is at the center of the ecosystem capacities that are needed. Many of the folks who are joining us are allies and partners, are not actually organizing the same constituencies that you all do, but are interested in being supportive in a way that is meaningful and that supports you all to have the seat at the table, and the leadership role that you are already taking with your partners on this campaign.

I'm curious if you could share, what are some of the ways that, let's say academics and scholars, they were in one of those bubbles that was on the slide there, how they could be helpful as an example. And in your closing thought, how others can be helpful and supportive to the long history and rich work and the ongoing work that you are doing in Minnesota. If we could use that as a way of closing I would really appreciate it because there are lots of questions coming out about what the strategies would look like. Let's start with you, Doran.

DORAN SCHRANTZ:
Great question. Part of the capacity for change we need are relationships with people in other sectors. And it needs to be very intentional to do that. One specific thing I want to name about academics or policymaking expertise, is a huge problem that emerges for organizing groups in general or constituencies that emerge, is the main strategy to push them back out is to delegitimize them. And it is, I will throw out a big word, but it is a hegemonic effort. And it tends to be run by technocratic elites. And so it's, ‘they don't know what they are doing, they are crazy, it is too radical, they are not legit.'

And that plays a major role. A lot of people organizing saying the first fight you have is a recognition fight. The thing we are up against is not big evil powers someplace, we are up against the professional technocracy that gets deployed by power. Now if we have real
partnerships, with housing expertise, health expertise, people who have credibility in agencies and are on the inside, we could build more tissues and tendons of more connection, shared strategy, we could do two things. We could bring renters or young people of color, whatever the constituency to the table, and we could have a partnership with people who could support their capacity for governance.

There are things that we don't know about the inside. A lot of these organizations don't have the capacity to do all the technocratic things that really do need to be done to make a policy work. I'm not delegitimizing that, we have to make governance work. But we need people there who are going to try to make governance work for renters. I want public safety to work for the people who are bearing the brunt of the system that is failing.

We need you to recognize us. That would make a significant difference.

ADITI VAIDYA:
Thanks, Doran. I feel like this is a question that is coming up more as I'm looking at the chat, in different ways. It's a whole other session that maybe we should have a conversation about how we all work together, and you could share more examples. But I will say thank you to both of you for joining us, for sharing the 12+ years of history and going deep and sharing big concepts as well as specific examples. And to all of you have joined us on this webinar. I know we barely touched the surface when it came to your questions, and I'm hoping you learned a lot about how Minnesota as an example is so important to looking the ways in which community power building and that organizations are coming together for positive change, and how we can be supportive of community power building work in different ways.

Thank you so much for joining us, and I hope you'll join us for the next sessions; the link is in the chat. Do register so we can continue the conversation. Thanks and have a great afternoon!

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